DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 811 HE 018 853

AUTHOR	Cuninggim, Merrimon
TITLE	The Pros and Cons of Advisory Committees.
INSTITUTION	Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jul 85
NOTE	23p.; Document is printed in colored ink on colored paper.
AVAILABLE FROM	Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, One Dupont Circle, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036 ($2.50).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Advisory Committees; *College Administration; *Fund Raising; Higher Education; Institutional Advancement; Needs Assessment; *Program Evaluation; *Public Relations; Recruitment; School Personnel

ABSTRACT

The structure and purposes of college and university advisory committees are discussed. An advisory or visiting committee is a voluntary extralegal group of advisors and/or supporters that provide aid in various ways to an educational institution, professional school, department, or major academic division. Advisory committees may be elected by the institution's board of trustees or its executive committee, or appointed by the president or a dean. The committee's composition is always a mix, with alumni, scholars, influential laymen, leaders of a profession, and perhaps a trustee or two. In size, advisory committees run from 4 to 60. Meetings may be held twice a year or less frequently. Seven major purposes of advisory committees are as follows: (1) to strengthen the academic program; (2) to improve the school's management; (3) to review and evaluate the mission, programs, and services of the college; (4) to recruit personnel; (5) to raise funds; (6) to promote public relations; and (7) to improve the school's relationships with other schools in and outside the university, with the university's central administration, church or state, community agencies, and professional organizations. The effectiveness of visiting committees is also addressed. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ACB

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One Dupont Circle
Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/296-8400

Association of
Governing Boards
of Universities
& Colleges

Merrimon Cuninggim

Among his activities in retirement, Merrimon Cuninggim is president of the Center for Effective Philanthropy. He is a past president of the Danforth Foundation and of Salem College (N.C.) and a former member of AGB's Board of Directors. Cuninggim serves on the board of visitors of Wake Forest University, and is a retired member of the boards of trustees of Vanderbilt University and Duke University.

© 1985, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
Printed in the United States of America.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Pros and Cons of Advisory Committees

Introduction

During the 1960s, when the Danforth Foundation was the largest philanthropic fund working solely in the field of higher education, it got interested in the problems of educational governance and management. It was at this time that Merrimon Cuninggim, then president of Danforth, began to look at advisory boards, visiting committees, and similar devices for strengthening the work of trustees and administrators.

Service on such groups at several institutions gave him further exposure to their working, their problems, and their promise. A few years ago, the Lilly Endowment, Inc. asked him to do a paper on visiting committees, particularly in seminaries, and AGB invited him to speak on the subject at its annual conference in Atlanta in 1983. Out of all this has come the following paper on a subject of growing importance and potentially great usefulness to American higher education.

—*The Editors*

What is an advisory committee?

An advisory committee or visiting committee is a voluntary, extralegal group of advisors and/or supporters drawn together to give aid in one or usually many ways to an educational institution or one of its subunits, a professional school, a department, or a major academic division.

In the last ten years or so, many colleges and universities have begun to use advisory committees as auxiliary agencies for better

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

governing. Members of such committees are called all kinds of things, "visitors," "associates," and "advisors" being the most common. The group as a whole is likely to be termed a "council" or "board" as well as a "committee." Full titles, therefore, may be "the visiting" or "visitors' committee," "the associates' council" or "the board of advisors," or some other combination of these words.

As a voluntary service agency the advisory committee, be it noted, is not a second governing board or a rival to the trustees. It is more on the order of an appendage, yet not to be confused with such cheerleading derivatives as the alumni association or the athletic boosters' club. The visiting committee is a serious academic tool for the institution.

Though titles have slightly different meanings, and though some differentiation among groups has occasionally been attempted on linguistic grounds, prevailing usage has resulted in their all meaning just about the same thing. This does not signify, however, that one term is as good as another. For example, "board" is the most honorific, yet also the most misleading, for it sounds so self-important. Lest it be implied erroneously that the group is somehow official, it may be wise not to use "board"; and its members can best be known by some nonofficial, helping-hand descriptive such as "advisor" or "visitor."

By whatever name these groups are called, they have recently proliferated on campuses all across the country. Many institutions, small colleges especially, will have just one committee or perhaps two, but universities may have five or ten or fifty. Even individual schools or divisions of universities may have more than one, each for a different purpose.

Yet for all their rapid growth, very little has been written about them. Though it is their purpose and the related topic of performance that are the two most important considerations for advisory committees, many people want to know the details of structure and management, according to the experience of various campuses. Because answers to such questions turn out to be just about what one would

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

expect, these matters can be told in short order, prior to a discussion of the more significant concerns.

Advisory committees: their structure

First, as to how advisory committees are chosen: They may be elected by the institution's board of trustees or its executive committee, or appointed by the president or a dean. I've heard of one self-perpetuating committee. It doesn't much matter; what matters is how *well* they are chosen.

The composition of advisory committees is always a mix—with alumni, scholars, influential laymen, "leaders of the profession," and perhaps a trustee or two. A law school advisory committee will have some lawyers on it, a divinity school group will have some clergymen, and so forth.

In size, advisory committees run all the way from four to sixty. The average is twelve to fifteen—small enough to be engaged, large enough to get things done.

Members' terms are usually for three, four, five, or an unspecified number of years. They are, or are not, eligible for reelection. One place I know goes to great lengths with a formal "installation."

Meetings are held about two times a year, or maybe one per year, or once every two years; or sometimes they are forgotten and the committee just goes out of existence.

The schedule for a meeting varies at least as much as everything else. A few advisory committees meet for as long as two days; more often, it is for one day, with a night in between two half-days. Meetings can be as short as an hour or two, but if that is what you have in mind you'd better forget the whole thing. Some college advisory committees meet two or three times a year for dinner and the evening.

The agenda is usually prepared by the chairman and/or the dean or comparable officer. It is nearly always too crowded for the time available.

On many campuses the care and feeding of advisory committees amounts to a considerable business. Staff help is provided, special materials are prepared, members' expenses are reimbursed (but no honoraria), directories are published, and one place boasts of giving "complimentary

BEST COPY AVAILAB.

parking." The "checklist" at another institution, to be used before its advisory committee comes to town, itemizes thirty-five things for staff attention.

Reports are expected periodically. Generally, one written report is submitted each year, addressed to the board or president or dean. They may be confidential or public; either way has its advantages. Reports tend to be pleased with everything about the institution except the lack of money. They are sometimes even taken seriously.

Does all of this give the impression that visiting committees are over-organized? Examples can easily be found. But more often they are under-organized, even downright informal. Though many colleges and universities want to benefit from the advisory committee device, they sometimes give the impression of not wanting to bother with it enough to do it well.

This brief summary of behavior indicates that there is more than one way to organize and conduct advisory committees. In such arrangements rigidity and too-great specificity of detail should be avoided. But these are merely housekeeping concerns. The heart of the matter consists in the twin questions of purpose and performance: What are advisory committees founded to do? What *do* they do? How well do they do it? How can they be helped to do it better?

Before we begin to search out specific answers to these questions, we need to pay our passing respects to the orotund answer with which some institutions delude themselves. This is the grandiose, all-inclusive purpose: the advisory committee is expected "to assist in the articulation, dissemination and achievement of [the institution's] goals and objectives."

"The general purpose" of the advisory committee, said one enthusiastic president, is "the evaluation and enhancement of University life," which means "assisting the administration in the maintenance and growth of quality" in every aspect. Committees "shall serve to advise" on nearly everything imaginable, and "make recommendations for the betterment of [the institution]." At the end of one such listing the dreamer wakes up briefly: "No [ad-

BEST COPY AVAILABL

visory committee] could be expected to cover all of these dimensions in every meeting."

Most of these overly ambitious statements of purpose have the board more in mind than the president: "to assist the Trustees. . ." ". . . to augment Trustee expertise . . .," ". . . to serve as an advisory group to the Trustees. . ." This has led one commentator to opine that advisory committees "are like mini-Boards," and thus should be "constituted to provide a balance of 'work, wealth and wisdom.' " But that way, I believe, is the path of delusion and perhaps disaster for the committee. My observation has been that, whenever a visiting committee overreaches its role, it does not enhance its influence, it weakens it. The legally constituted authority for any educational institution is its board of trustees, by whatever name it goes; and an advisory committee, by whatever name *it* is known, is no more than a committee of advisors.

But when such a committee has its purposes defined modestly, and when it gets to work on them in good temper and to good effect, it can make a valuable contribution to the school it serves. One by one we shall examine seven major purposes that advisory committees have been asked to adopt in institutions of higher education, with some reference to performance as well as to stated aim:

The seven major purposes of advisory committees

1. To strengthen the academic program of the school or some segment is a near-unanimous reason for calling together a group of outside advisors. This worthy intention is described in a variety of ways: An advisory committee has "a primary responsibility for assessing the present strength and long-range potential for educational service"; it can serve as "a source of objectivity . . . of ideas . . . of fresh perspective" for "the total educational enterprise." To become "informed of the academic goals" of the school is the committee's "principal function," for this leads it to "counsel . . . on the implementation of objectives," or as another phrases it, to "consider proposals for and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

make recommendations with respect to the educational role" of the school.

Several dangers are attendant upon the pursuit of this purpose. Most of the members of the typical advisory committee are simply not qualified, by training or experience, to know what strengthening the educational component or the intellectual life of an institution or one of its parts consists in. This seems to be true not merely when committee members are laymen; if as professionals they have been out of school for a goodly season they might be equally ineligible. If an advisory committee is going to tackle academic topics in depth, it better have a strong nucleus of people who know the territory—and the language. The first note of warning, then, is to say that the assignment of this crucial task to an advisory committee ought not to be made unless the group seems competent to undertake it.

But there are no automatic signs of such competence. Certainly the Ph.D. is not one. At the risk of seeming to double back on my argument, I want to affirm the principle of lay governance for educational institutions in general, and for all aspects of those institutions. Intelligent laymen can learn to ask the right questions in all but the most abstruse and rarefied fields; and a well-chosen advisory committee full of generalists is at least as likely as the board to become knowedgeable and, soon thereafter, useful to the academic life of the school. The right *questions*—that, perhaps, is the key.

Not the right answers. The advisory committee by itself should not expect, or be expected, to come up with brilliant solutions to academic problems. In other words, one of the dangers to be avoided is pretentiousness. Merely being appointed to the committee does not confer on anyone the right to swashbuckle around a complex field of learning and/or professional training. For a conscientious committee member, the trick is to learn how to test, to challenge, to probe, but not to pontificate.

The next danger is unpleasant to record but cannot be hidden. Every advisory committee that begins to amount to something seems to run into a potential roadblock,

BEST COPY AVAILAR

namely, opposition in the faculty. Many faculty members do not take kindly to the idea that an outside group might mess around in the curriculum. No matter what purpose an advisory committee tries to fulfill, the faculty by and large tends to be suspicious, but their greatest objection would be reserved for the committee's effort to strengthen the academic program.

Add to these troubles the lack of time that an outside voluntary group has for its tasks and their inherent difficulty even in the best of conditions, and one can begin to marvel at an advisory committee's trying to discharge this assignment at all. Yet the record, I believe, is encouraging; not a howling achievement, to be sure, but on balance a qualified success. Let us look at a few anonymous instances:

There is the case of an advisory committee's examination of a school's work-study program: the committee pushed for a pedagogical rationale that had theretofore been lacking, and now that school's program of "experiential learning" is part of the regular curriculum. There is the case of a committee's hearing three faculty members present their ideas about "Preparation for Leadership"; and in the ensuing lively discussion everyone's perceptions, including the faculty's, were stretched. Fruitful discussions about academic matters cover a broad range of questions: Should graduate assistants be used in undergraduate teaching? What is the profit in studying ancient languages? Who teaches ethics? Or can the subject be taught? How many of the football players graduate? Etc., etc.

The most fascinating advisory committee program I ever heard was no discussion at all. It was strictly a lecture by a distinguished faculty member on his recent experience in testifying at an evolution "creation-science" court hearing. From that presentation committee members developed a keener appreciation of how and why that school through the years has stood against obscurantism and for academic integrity and excellence. As a result, I believe, that committee is better prepared to help in strengthening the academic life of the institution.

2. Much easier for advisory committees to comprehend is the second purpose, **to**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

improve the management of the school. Since most members are laymen, they tend to feel more at home with the institution's bread-and-butter issues—which is often the case with boards of trustees as well.

The surprise, however, is that advisory committees seem to spend little time and attention on this task. One committee I know is charged with "assisting . . . in the enhancement of internal operational policies"; it "shall regularly inform itself and give counsel with respect to the general management of the School, with special reference to the Office of the Dean." But its agendas almost never provide the opportunity for such a discussion. The problem may lie in the phrase, "the general management of the School," for this particular committee is effective in the performance of many of the specific duties still to be described. Examining administration in general, however, seems to be a difficult function to embrace—perhaps because groups of advisors are seldom given the opportunity to look critically at a school's general management.

The basic reason may be, of course, that most institutions have not yet clarified their thinking about this function. Whereas a board of trustees and the general officers know full well that the curriculum of each professional school should be decided by its own professionals and their corps of advisors, the board and officers think housekeeping and storekeeping should be centralized. Whereas the central administration is quite willing to delegate to an advisory committee or dean the task, at least in part, of strengthening its academic program, no delegation for improving management may seem either fitting or necessary. The committee is not the board, and the dean is not the president; and it may be that, on this point of operations, boards are less willing to receive help from advisory groups than anywhere else.

3. In descriptions and bylaws of visitation committees the more ambitious task of **evaluation** is beginning to be mentioned now and then. "The Board of Visitors," says one statement, "should be concerned with every dimension of the school . . . and should give special attention to eval-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

uation." Another's "Guidelines" direct "The Board of Advisors [to] review and evaluate the mission, programs, services and functions of the School." After one visiting committee got bogged down discussing its purpose, an able and impatient businessman spoke directly to the school's leadership: "We've got no problem here. This group has only two things to do. First, you tell us *what* you're doing, and then we'll tell you *how* you're doing." The rest of the meeting was more productive.

But the task is not always that easy. Evaluation is considerably more formal, more far-reaching, and more serious than estimating or examining or even appraising. Evaluation takes concentrated effort and a large measure of expertise. No matter what schools sometimes say they want from their advisory committees, or what the committees themselves may sometimes be challenged to attempt, candor forces the admission that most such groups are ill-equipped to attempt genuine evaluation. To help in the strengthening of program or management is an ongoing occupation, concurrent with whatever other officers and staff are trying to do. But to engage in *evaluation* is, though sometimes concurrent, largely and characteristically an after-the-fact activity; it is judgmental and may even be adversarial. Perhaps the most that should be hoped for in this regard is that an advisory committee will see the need for evaluation, will encourage the school to get it or will itself make provision for it by outside agencies, and will take it into account when the evaluation is completed.

In my study I found few advisory groups that did much more than talk about its desirability. In fact, I have known only one visiting committee that ever attempted serious evaluation. The operation was successful but the patient died. That is, the head of the involved division of the institution was so outraged at what the evaluation revealed, correctly, about his own administration that he succeeded in killing the committee. To put it mildly, this function for advisory committees has not yet proved itself.

4. One of the pleasantest tasks in which advisory committees may occasionally get

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

involved is **the recruitment of personnel**. Prime targets to be recruited, of course, are those who pay the freight; one committee announces its "purpose" is to "assist in identifying and recruiting outstanding students." Another's intention is "to assist the Trustees in attracting the human . . . resources necessary to the [institution's] continuing growth and health," meant maybe to include faculty, administrators, and other useful folks as well as students. It is indeed true that an individual member of an advisory committee may help persuade a celebrity to join the faculty or a *cum laude* to become a student, but committees as a whole have no great future in talent search or as adjunct to the admissions office.

In fact, committee members often come closer to being the hunted than the hunters. Some officials frankly admit that the institution uses its advisory groups as a "training ground" for the official board. In one school the committee was characterized as "a vestibule for new Trustees"; and in another the figure of speech was "breeding ground." Whether or not effective breeding takes place in that vestibule, it can be no more than a happy by-product of an advisory committee's existence. The serious purposes of advisory groups lie elsewhere.

5. Perhaps the purpose most often mentioned, and strangely most often denied, for any kind of visiting committee is **money raising**. This umbrella is meant to cover related forms of support-seeking of tangible items of value.

First, for the denials: Invitations to committee membership are almost always couched in terms of negative assurance. "This is not a fund-raising group; we have a development office for that." Fund raising is considered crass and grubby. If it were admitted that fund raising is one of the committee's jobs, the invitation to join might be turned down.

This is an unfortunate presumption. Surely people with money are almost as capable of being candid, and being treated with candor, as people without money. If money raising is a legitimate purpose for an advisory committee, it ill behooves the institution to be mealymouthed about it.

Yet we do need to recognize that this purpose is not universal among visiting committees. I have found several advisory groups that exercise no money-raising function, admitted or hidden. In every instance the parent institution sponsored a second group that gave large or sole attention to securing funds. The agency not concerned with fund raising centered its attention on the academic program and on the two functions still to be mentioned in this listing.

The two favorite euphemisms for fund raising are, of course, "development" and "advancement," but the language advising a committee on this point is highly varied. The "directions" for one group include its "serving as a focal point for generating plans for fund-raising and development." Another wants "to stem the impact of increasing tuition and costs." Still another is asked succinctly to "raise friends and funds."

An advisory committee's involvement with financial matters is not limited to money raising. For example, one visiting committee is asked to "review . . . the annual budget . . . and assist in maintaining a current financial plan based on educational goals and requirements; . . . to study the School's long-range position . . . and recommend a five-year master plan projection for fiscal stability, security and advancement." But most of the emphasis is on raising the necessary wherewithal: " . . . to design, initiate and promote plans for achieving required current fund support for operations [and] for endowment and special programs and projects through gifts, bequests and estate plans."

Another buzzword is "cultivation": in its "plans for capital development," one "Board of Visitors" is urged to identify "potential sources of substantial gifts and bequests," and to engage in "the cultivation of interest in [the school] among these sources, in order that they may be encouraged to provide such gifts and bequests."

But the line between being agent and being victim is thin. Any institution hopes its committee will help to raise money outside, but is no less willing for it to be raised inside—i.e., contributed. One of-

ficer states the case bluntly: "Members [of an advisory committee] should have some philanthropic potential, either as donors or as advocates." The committee's function, strictly speaking, is to "attract money" from others, but the school's purpose in establishing such a committee may well have been to persuade its members themselves to sign on the dotted line.

The work that advisory groups have done in fulfillment of this purpose, including the money they themselves have contributed, seems to have been worth the school's efforts. At various times and in various places visiting committees have raised or given funds for endowed lectureships, aid to minority students, special collections in the library, faculty sabbaticals, campus beautification, classroom equipment, staff salaries, and even for the regular annual budget, unallocated. One dean likes to say that his advisory committee exists for "the general purpose of goodwill," tangibly expressed; the committee members' expenses are "never a charge on the School's budget," for (with a smile of understatement) "they always pay more than their way."

6. Goodwill can also be a nonmonetary commodity, of course. One of the most important purposes for which advisory councils are established is **public relations,** the systematic effort to portray the institution so as to elicit feelings of admiration and warmth; in other words, to build goodwill. By dignified, professorial types, however, public relations is sometimes looked upon as beneath notice, almost as earthy an exercise as money raising. On occasion, therefore, schools have come close to disavowing this aim; and when admitting to it, they have always phrased it in polite, unexaggerated language. No blatant advertising; no cheap propaganda.

Witness: "Members of the [advisory] Board shall be expected to act as ambassadors for [the school], telling [its] story and extending a positive image of the institution." "The Board of Advisors shall . . . become a strong and constant advocate of the School as it seeks to serve its constituents and be a national force in

[postgraduate] education." The visiting committee shall "consider and implement programs for extending and enhancing the School's reputation." "The Board of Visitors can be especially helpful in assisting the School . . . in broadening its visibility," and so forth.

But this purpose, like fund raising, is characterized by a measure of ambiguity. Even as an advisory committee may be created both to give and to help raise money, so also it may be fostered by its parent school both to personify and to become involved in image building. When a great university sets up twenty or thirty, or in one instance over sixty visiting committees, and when hundreds of leaders—in the last case, almost a thousand people of distinction—accept invitations to become members of those committees, the job of public relations is already, and spectacularly, accomplished. There is nothing wrong, of course, with a school's using the advisory committee idea in order to attach to its name persons whose reputation will lend luster. So far as I am aware, no committee has been averse to this strategy.

But, once selected, advisory committees have often done good work in public relations. Among activities that fall within this category are the following: critical examination of a school's publications, help in obtaining distinguished speakers, reinforcement of programs for or by alumni, assistance in getting appropriate media coverage, discovery of work-study and student visitation opportunities, bestowal of kudos for faculty and staff achievements. An advisory committee is not meant to substitute for a publicity office any more than for a development office, but the committee has a useful role to play in spreading the word.

7. Similar but sufficiently distinct to call for separate treatment is the function **to improve the school's relationships** in several crucial directions: with other schools in and outside the university, with the university's central administration, with church or state depending on institutional sponsorship, with various community agencies near and far, with professional organizations, and with sister institutions

wherever. This is not merely a matter of saying the right thing, or of persuading others to think well of the school. This is much more than a concern for image. It has to do with whether the college or the university can get along with its diverse neighbors, or critics, or kinsmen, or competitors. One school took note that "developing effective external relationships" was unusually important and laid it as a special charge on its committee of advisors to fulfill.

Two forms of this liaison function call for special notice. The first applies mainly to a university, and touches on a school's or division's relationships with other parts of the institution and with the institution as a whole. When an advisory committee discovers that its school or division has got some fences to attend to, either tearing down or mending as the circumstances warrant, it may sometimes have more influence with the university administration than the dean may. It must beware the temptation, except in most unusual circumstances, to be a special advocacy group for one person or idea, or a grievance committee, or a high-visibility critic. But if the committee escapes these dangers its beneficent influence on the central administration can be pronounced.

This function cannot be performed, however, when an institution makes a point of keeping its advisory committees at arm's length from the center of power—that is, from president or board or both. This is unfortunately the case with a number of committees I have come to know. One member complained, "We should be made official"; but I disagree. The trouble is not that an advisory committee, by definition, is extralegal; and it would be not only difficult but structurally unsound to make such groups legal entities, with authority. The trouble, rather, is simply a lack of direct access to the seat of institutional authority. This makes it harder for committees to believe in their own importance and usefulness, easier for them to become weak and ineffective.

When an advisory committee does have entree, however, it can sometimes make a crucial difference in a crisis. In one institution five officers reported separately that "the two most important contribu-

tions" of a visiting committee over a period of several years were "the interpretation of the School to the Board" and "the interpretation of the School to the University Administration." "The Board and the Administration got educated."

A second form of this function has to do with paying heed to the institution's relationships with all sorts of agencies in the community or constituency, near at hand and far afield, lay and professional. This can get picayunish: members can become errand boys for the school, "serve as hosts. . ." (as one official admitted), represent the school at installations, funerals and other rituals, and generally hew the wood and draw the water. When this kind of opportunity arises, the smartest response of the committee member is usually, "No thank you."

More productive is the committee's undertaking an objective examination of relationships and subsequently embarking on a program of improvement of those relationships. A well-ordered committee that includes members of the community is more likely to see relationships accurately than either faculty or staff. One thoughtful commentator said that "acting as a link or go-between" for the school and the community was a "basic function" of the visiting committee.

The tough and biting problem of relationships is between any institution and its real, supposed, or sometime sponsor, normally either church or state. Fully independent colleges are the only institutions that escape this worry. For church-related or tax-supported institutions, the problem is remarkably similar: To what extent and by what strategems can the academic institution establish, protect, and maintain its own sovereignty? When neither state nor church tries to intervene in campus affairs, everything is sweetness and light; but when either seeks to assert its supposed paternal office, then at the least there is serious discord. The point of mentioning such an unpleasant possibility is simply to note that, when other collegiate entities come to be suspect because of their assumed partisanship—board, administration, faculty, alumni—advisory committees may seem more impartial, and thus may be able to help in the difficult business

of settling strife and improving relationships with outside, disaffected sponsors.

In point of fact, committees have indeed functioned in this fashion when called by crisis to do so. If it were useful, examples could be given of a state's or a church's suspicion of an institution's orthodoxy, patriotic or religious, or of an institution's suspicion of a state's or a church's devotion to learning. Pinheads versus eggheads, reason versus emotion, fundamentalism versus scholarship—these are the types of inflammation that must sometimes be dealt with. It is in some such sticky situation, when passions get aroused, that advisory committees can play and have played a healing role. One committee of my acquaintance has recently decided that its next major "objective" will be "to develop a closer relationship between school and church"—which might as easily have been, if the sponsor were different, between the school and the state government.

These, then, are the chief purposes for which advisory committees are established and which in the main they try to perform:

- strengthening the academic program
- improvement of the school's internal management
- evaluation of performance
- recruitment of personnel
- money raising
- improvement of public relations
- betterment of outside relationships

What have been the results? What impression does one get as to the overall effectiveness of advisory committees? Beyond those comments already made, I have five further observations to share, growing out of my study of the behavior of such committees hither and yon, and of their academic sponsors.

How effective are they?

First, there exists a considerable uncertainty as to the purposes of visiting committees and their priorities. What comes first? What is most important? Uncertainty breeds frustration, and if schools are to keep their committees motivated and eager, they must define and clarify their purposes in credible, conservative lan-

guage. Uncertainty often exists in the thinking of the school as well as in the committee. Does the school really want an active advisory committee? A strong one? Does the committee get in the way? Whose way? Is a vigorous group of advisors an asset or a liability? The administration needs to make up its mind.

Second, the purposes of advisory committees often outrun their performance. Overblown language leads to extravagant expectations by committee members, school officials, or both. When a committee is successful, it is because there is a consonance between stated purpose and achievable performance.

Third, whatever their purposes, advisory committees can thus far claim only modest accomplishment. There are, of course, exceptions, but across the board, such groups have been only partly successful. One committee may work a minor miracle in curriculum reform. Another may arrange for or make a generous contribution to the school. Still another may heal a breach with the church or the state or some outside organization. But no committee can do it all. Moreover, no committee should *try* to do it all. Diversity and selectivity among advisory committees are desirable.

Fourth, the requisites for an effective advisory committee are clear and can be enumerated succinctly: careful selection; an assigned task; unqualified support by the board, the president, and the dean; and contact with other such committees in and out of the university. Further, and perhaps most important: The committee must not be patronized but must be taken seriously.

Fifth and finally, the most encouraging impression gained from my study was the keen desire on the part of all advisory committees I have met and nearly all their members to be genuinely useful. Sometimes they are not convinced that they are, when all they do—or so they think—is come and hear a speech, eat a meal, make a comment, leave a check perhaps, and go home. These volunteers must not be deluded with false assurances; they must be dealt with honestly. Then they can engage in effective action for the

institution to which they are attached. Truly, they want to help.

It behooves us, then, to give the idea a chance. The advisory committee, by whatever name it is known, has shown itself on many an occasion to be a useful governing device, an auxiliary tool for bringing new or renewed strength to an institution or one of its parts. Its future ought to be considerably brighter than its past. Let us learn how to use it.

The intent of this series is to provide informed perspectives from individuals who are knowledgeable about trusteeship and institutional governance. Their views are their own, however, and should not be construed to be official AGB positions, policies, or prescriptions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Trustee Information Center

Additional information about trusteeship is available from AGB's Trustee Information Center. To contact the center or to order any of these publications, call AGB at 202/296-8400.

This booklet is the sixteenth in a series, AGB Pocket Publications, designed to give both new and experienced trustees concise, summary information on subjects and issues of high interest to governing boards.

No. 1—Trustee Responsibilities
by John W. Nason

No. 2—Trustee Orientation and Development Programs
by Richard T. Ingram

No. 3—The Fund-Raising Role
by Michael Radock

No. 4—Trustees and Preventive Law
by Kent M. Weeks

No. 5—Academic Collective Bargaining
by Kenneth P. Mortimer

No. 6—Resource Management Responsibilities
by Charles A. Nelson

No. 7—The Tenure Issue
by Richard P. Chait and Andrew T. Ford

No. 8—The Board Chairperson and the President
by John W. Pocock

No. 9—A Guide for New Trustees
by Nancy R. Axelrod

No. 10—Building a More Effective Board
by Robert L. Gale

No. 11—Institutional Planning
by Rhoda M. Dorsey

No. 12—Affirmative Action
by Betty Newcomb

No. 13—Managing Your Endowment
by J. Peter Williamson

No. 14—The Board's Role in Accreditation
by the AGB Subcommittee on the Role of Trustees in Institutional and Specialized Accreditation

No. 15—Policy vs. Administration
by Charles A. Nelson

No. 16—The Pros and Cons of Advisory Committees
by Merrimon Cuninggim

July 1985

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One Dupont Circle
Washington,
D.C. 20036
202/296-8400

**Association of
Governing Boards
of Universities
& Colleges**